

Special License Plates

Purpose and History

Special license plates have a graphic design depicting an image related to an organization, concept, or interest. They are an alternate to standard Iowa license plates, which do not have graphics, and are only available with personalized configurations. There are currently 63 types of special license plates available in Iowa, including 24 associated with the military. All motor vehicles and trailers are eligible for special plates. Collegiate plates are not available for motorcycles or small trailers. As of June 30, 2012 there were an estimated 117,636 special plates issued in Iowa.

There is a legislative and an administrative process for the creation of new special license plates. For the creation of a special plate through the legislative process, the special license plate concept must be in the form of legislation sponsored by a Senator or Representative, or by a Senate or House committee. The legislation must follow the traditional process of being approved by both the Senate and the House before being sent to the Governor for final approval. An alternate administrative process for the creation of a special license plate is established in [Iowa Administrative Code section 761, Chapter 401](#). Through this administrative process, any individual, group, or State department may submit a proposal for a new special license plate to the Department of Transportation (DOT). If the DOT approves the proposal then the requestor has one calendar year to submit 500 paid applications before the new plate can be manufactured or issued.

Special license plates that have been created through legislation are listed below. State department sponsored plates are highlighted in red (and italics):

Special License Plates Sponsored by Legislation			
Air Force Cross Medal	<i>DNR Eagle</i>	Legion of Merit	Purple Heart
Airman's Medal	<i>DNR Goldfinch</i>	Loras College DuHawks	Saint Ambrose University Fighting Bees
Amateur Radio	<i>DNR Pheasant</i>	<i>Love Our Kids</i>	Service Cross Medal
<i>Breast Cancer Awareness</i>	<i>DNR Trout</i>	Luther College Norse	Silver Star
Bronze Star	Dordt College Defenders	Medal of Honor: Air Force	Simpson College
Buena Vista University	Drake University Bulldogs	Medal of Honor: Army	Soldiers Medal
Central College Dutch	<i>Educational</i>	Medal of Honor: Navy	U.S. Armed Forces Retired: Air Force
Coe College Kohawks	<i>Emergency Medical Services (EMS)</i>	<i>Motorcycle Rider Education</i>	U.S. Armed Forces Retired: Army
<i>Collegiate: Iowa State University</i>	Ex-Prisoner of War	Mount Mercy University Mustangs	U.S. Armed Forces Retired: Coast Guard
<i>Collegiate: University of Iowa</i>	<i>Fire Fighter</i>	National Guard	U.S. Armed Forces Retired: Marine
<i>Collegiate: University of Northern Iowa</i>	Gold Star Family	Navy Cross Medal	U.S. Armed Forces Retired: Navy
Cornell College Rams	Graceland University Yellowjackets	Navy/Marine Corps Medal	Upper Iowa University Peacocks
Disabled Veteran	Grand View University Vikings	Northwestern College Red Raiders	<i>Veterans</i>
<i>DNR Deer</i>	<i>Iowa Heritage</i>	Pearl Harbor Veteran	Wartburg College Knights
			William Pen Statesman

Special plates that have been created through procedures set forth in the Iowa Administrative Code are listed below. State agency sponsored plates are highlighted in red (and italics):

Special License Plates Created through Administrative Process	
<i>Cattlemen</i>	<i>Organ and Tissue Donor Awareness</i>
<i>Ducks Unlimited</i>	<i>Share the Road</i>
God Bless America	Shriners

More Information

Iowa DOT list of personalized and specialty plates: <http://www.iowadot.gov/mvd/ovs/plates/plates.htm>

Iowa General Assembly: <http://www.legis.iowa.gov/index.aspx>

LSA Staff Contact: Estelle Montgomery (515-725-2261) Estelle.Montgomery@legis.iowa.gov

State Funding for Special License Plates:

The total fees collected from special license plates, including initial issuance and annual renewal fees are deposited in the Road Use Tax Fund (RUTF). The annual renewal fee, if any, is termed a “validation fee.” The fee is paid in addition to the [annual vehicle registration fee](#). For special license plates sponsored by a State department, a special plate fee or “alternative fee” is collected and designated to a respective special fund. Prior to crediting the alternative fee to the RUTF, the State Treasurer credits the amount of fee collected in the previous month to the special fund. [Iowa Code section 321.34\(13\)\(d\)](#) details the general fee provisions for these plates.

An example of a State department-sponsored special plate is the Veterans plate. The plate is sponsored by the Department of Veterans Affairs. An alternative fee is collected from each plate and credited to the Veterans License Fee Fund. Funds are then appropriated to the Veterans Affairs Commission to be used to fulfill the responsibilities of the Commission. An exception to the above rule is the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) special plate. This plate is sponsored by the Department of Public Health; however, no alternative fee is collected, and all fees are deposited in the RUTF.

All fees collected from non-State agency sponsored plates are deposited in the RUTF. [Iowa Code section 321.34\(12\)\(d\)](#) details the general fee provisions for these plates. An example of a non-State agency sponsored special plate is the Bronze Star plate. The total fees collected from each plate are deposited in the RUTF.

Related Statutes:

Iowa Code sections [312.2](#), [321.34](#), [321.105](#), [321.109](#), [321.166](#)
[Iowa Administrative Code 761, Chapter 401](#)